اِنَّ هٰذَا الْقُرْاٰنَ يَهْدِيْ لِلَّتِيْ هِيَ اَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِيْنَ الَّذِيْنَ يَعْمَلُوْنَ الصّٰلِحٰتِ اَنَّ لَهُمْ اَجْرًا كَبِيْرًا

Quran English Translation and Tafseer

Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi

Surah 99 Al-Zalzalah (The Earthquake)

سُوْرَةُ الزِّلْزَالِ مَدَنِيَّةٌ

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

(In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate)

اِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْاَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا ۙ﴿۱﴾

(99-1) When the earth will be shaken with a mighty shaking, [1]

(1) Zalzalah means to shake violently over and over again. Thus, zulzilat-il ardu means that the earth will be shaken violently by convulsion after convulsion, and since shaking of the earth has been mentioned, it automatically gives the meaning that the entire earth will be shaken and not a limited territory of it. Then, in order to express the great intensity of the earthquake the word zilzalaha has been added, which literally means: its being shaken. It means: It will be so shaken as a huge sphere like it ought to be shaken, or shaken to its utmost intensity. Some commentators have taken it to imply the first earthquake with which the first stage of Resurrection will begin, i.e. when all living beings will perish and the present order of the world will be upset. But, according to a large section of them, it implies the earthquake with which the second stage of Resurrection will begin, i.e. when all the former and the latter generations of mankind will rise back to life. This second commentary seems to be more correct, for the whole subsequent theme supports it.

وَ اَخْرَجَتِ الْاَرْضُ اَثْقَالَهَا ۙ﴿۲﴾

(99-2) and the earth will throw up all her burdens, [2]

(2) This same has been expressed in Surah Al-Inshiqaq, Ayat 4, thus: And throws out whatever is within it, and becomes empty. It has several meanings:

(1) It will cast out bodies of the dead in whatever form and state and wherever they may be lying in the earth; and the following sentence indicates that at that time all the scattered parts of the bodies will reassemble and be resurrected once again in the same form and shape as they had been in their first life, for if it were not so, how will they say: What has happened to the earth? It will not only cast out the dead bodies of men but also all traces and evidences of the words, deeds and activities of their former life lying buried in it; the following sentence points out that the earth will narrate all that had happened on its back.

(2) A third meaning has also been given by some commentators, saying that it will cast out the treasures of gold, silver, jewels and every kind of wealth lying hidden in the earth's belly and man will see it and realize how he thirsted for these things in the world, how he committed murders, thefts, robberies and piracies in the land and sea, usurped the rights of others, waged wars and devastated vast populations. On that Day all that will lie heaped up before him, yet of no avail, but will rather become a means of punishment for him.

وَ قَالَ الْاِنْسٰنُ مَا لَ ا ۳

(99-3) and man will cry out: "What is the matter with her?" (3)

(3) Man here may as well imply every man, for after resurrection and coming to senses the first impression of every man will be as to what was happening around him; afterwards he will realize that it was the Resurrection Day. Man may also imply the man who denies the Hereafter, for what he regarded as impossible would be happening in front of him and causing him confusion and bewilderment. As for the believers, they will not be bewildered and confused, for everything would be taking place

according to their belief and conviction. To an extent, this second meaning is supported by Verse 52 of Surah Ya Seen, in which it has been said that the deniers of the Hereafter at that time will exclaim: Ah, who has roused us from our sleeping place? And the reply given would be: This is the same which the Merciful God had promised and the Messengers sent by God had spoken the truth. This verse does not expressly say that this answer to the disbelievers would actually be given by the believers, for there is no indication of it in the verse. The probability, however, is that the believers will give them this answer.

يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ اَخْبَارَهَا ۙ﴿۴﴾

(99-4) On that Day it will relate all her news, (4)

(4) According to Abu Hurairah, the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited this verse and asked: Do you know what annals it will relate? The people said: Allah and His Messenger have the best knowledge. Thereupon the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: The annals are that the earth will testify to the deeds which every man and woman has done on its back. It will say: He or she had done such and such a thing on such and such a day. These will be the annals the earth will narrate. (Musnad Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Nasai, Ibn Jarir, Abd bin Humaid, Ibn al-Mundhir, Hakim, Ibn Marduyah, Baihaqi in Ash-Shuab). According to Rabiah Kharashi, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: Beware of the earth, for it is your root and basis, and there is nothing which a person does on it, and it will not report, whether it is good or bad. (Mujam at-Tabarani). Anas reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: The earth on the Day of Resurrection will bring out every act that would have been done on its back. Then he recited these verses. (Ibn Marduyah, Baihaqi). About Ali it is related that when he distributed the money of the Bait al- Mal (public treasury) among the needy ones and thus emptied it, he would perform two rakahs of the Prayer in it and say: You will have to bear witness that I filled you with justice and emptied you with justice.

It might have been difficult for a man of ancient times to understand how the earth will speak and narrate the annals and events happening on it on the Resurrection Day, but in the present age of scientific discoveries and the inventions of cinema, loudspeaker, radio, television, tape-recorder, electronic equipment, etc., it is no longer difficult to understand how the earth will narrate its annals. The impression of whatever man speaks is preserved in the air, in the radio waves, on the particles of the walls and floors and ceilings of the houses, and on the environments of the road, plain or field if he spoke outside the house. If Allah so wills He can make these things repeat all these voices precisely in the way these were uttered in the first instance by man. Man at that time will hear with his ears and know that it was his own voice, and all his acquaintances will also testify that whatever they were hearing was the person's own voice and his own accent. Then whatever man has done anywhere on the earth, and in whatever state, has had its impression on everything of the environment and its image inscribed on it. Even if he did something in pitch dark, there are such rays in the Kingdom of God for which darkness and light make no difference; they can preserve his image in any case. All these images will pass before man on the Resurrection Day like a motion picture, and will show him when and where he had done something during his life on the earth.

The fact is that although Allah directly knows whatever a man does, yet in the Hereafter when He will establish His court, He will punish every culprit only after fulfilling all the demands of justice. Any case which is brought before His court against a criminal will be proved with such perfect evidence that no room will be left to doubt his being a criminal. The first and foremost evidence against him is the record in which the two recording angels are recording his each word and deed. (Surah Qaaf, Ayats 17-18; Surah Al-Infitar, Ayats 10-12). This record will be handed over to him and he will be asked to read it, for "you yourself suffice as reckoner against yourself." (Surah Bani Israil, Ayat 14). Reading it man will be bewildered, for "it has left nothing un-recorded of our deeds, small or great." (Surah Al-Kahf, Ayat 49). Then there is man's own body which he had used in the world. In Allah's court his own tongue

will bear witness as to what he had been speaking through it in the world, his own hands and feet will bear witness as to what deeds he had committed through them (Surah An-Noor, Ayat 24). His eyes and his ears will bear witness as to what he saw and heard by their means. Even the skin of his body will bear witness to his deeds. Bewildered, he will ask his limbs: Why have you borne witness against me? They will reply: The same God Who has given speech to everything has given us speech. (Surah Ha Mim As-Sajdah, Ayats 20- 22). On top of these, there will be the witnesses which will be presented from the earth and all its environments, in which man will hear his own voice by his own ears and see the exact pictures of his own deeds by his eyes. Furthermore, the ideas, motives and aims hidden in the heart of man and the intentions with which he had performed every deed will be brought out and placed before him as is stated in Surah Al-Adiyat. That is why with the production of such absolute, clear and undeniable proofs, man will be confounded and he will be left with no chance to say anything in self-defense to excuse himself. (Surah Al-Mursalat, Ayats 35-36).

بِاَنَّ رَبَّکَ اَوۡحٰی لَہَا ؕ﴿۵﴾

(99-5) for your Lord will have commanded her (to do so).

یَوۡمَئِذٍ یَّصۡدُرُ النَّاسُ اَشۡتَاتًا ۬ۙ لِّیُرَوۡا اَعۡمَالَہُمۡ ؕ﴿۶﴾

(99-6) On that Day people will go forth in varying states (5) so that they be shown their deeds. (6)

(5) This can have two meanings:

(1) That each man will present himself in his own individual capacity. Families, groups, parties, nations, all will scatter away. This thing has also been said at other places in the Quran, for e.g. according to Surah Al-Anam, Ayat 94, Allah on that Day will say to the people: So, you have come before Us all alone, as We created you the first time, and in Surah Maryam: He will appear before Us all alone (Verse 80); and Every one of them will be presented before Him individually on the Resurrection Day. (Verse 95).

(2) That the people who during thousands and thousands of years had died at different places; will be rising from different corners of the earth and proceeding in groups, as has been said in Surah An-Naba: The day the Trumpet is blown, you will come out in crowds. (Verse 18).

Apart from these, there is no room in the word ashtatan for the meanings, which different commentators have given, and are, therefore, outside the literal bounds of this word, although they are correct by themselves and in accordance with the conditions depicted of the Resurrection Day in Quran and the Hadith.

(6) This can have two meanings:

(1) That they are shown their deeds, i.e. each one will be told what he did in the world.

(2) That they are shown the rewards of their deeds.

Although this second meaning can also be taken of the words li yurau jazaa a malahum (so as to be shown the rewards of their deeds) but li yurau a malahum (so as to be shown their deeds). Therefore, the first meaning is preferable, especially when at several places in the Quran it has been stated clearly that the disbeliever and the believer, the righteous and the wicked, the obedient and the disobedient, all will be given their records. (see Surah Al- Haqqah, Ayats 19, 25; Surah Al-Inshiqaq, Ayats 7, 10). Evidently, there is no difference between showing somebody his deeds and handing over to him his record. Furthermore, when the earth will narrate whatever had happened on it, the whole picture of the conflict between the truth and the falsehood that has been raging since the beginning of time and will continue to rage till the end, will also appear before the people and they will see what part the truth loving people played in it and what vile deeds did the supporters of falsehood commit against them. It may well be that the people will hear with their own ears all the speeches and dialogues of the callers to right guidance and of the publicists of error and evil; the whole record of the writings and literature produced by the two sides will be placed intact before them, and the people gathered together in the Plain of Assembly will see with their own eyes the persecution of the lovers of truth by the worshippers of falsehood and all the scenes of the bitter conflict that raged between the two parties.

فَمَن يَّعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَّرَهٗ ۝٧

(99-7) So, whoever does an atom's weight of good shall see it;

وَ مَن يَّعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَّرَهٗ ۝٨

(99-8) and whoever does an atom's weight of evil shall see it. (7)

(7) A simple and straightforward meaning of this statement, and it is right and correct, is that not an atom’s weight of good or evil done by a person, will have been left unrecorded in his conduct book, and he will see it in any case. But if seeing is taken to imply seeing its reward and punishment, it will be wrong to take it in the meaning that in the Hereafter every person will be rewarded for his most minor offence, and no one will be left un-rewarded for a good and unpunished for an evil done by him. For in the first place, it would mean that each evil act will be punished and each good act rewarded separately; secondly, it also means that no believer, however righteous and virtuous, will remain safe from being punished for a most ordinary error, and no disbeliever, however wicked and iniquitous, will be left unrewarded for a most ordinary good act. Both these meanings are opposed not only to the explanations given in the Quran and the Hadith, but also to reason. From the point of view of reason, it is not understandable that a master would refuse to pardon a most loyal and dutiful servant for a minor error, and along with rewarding for each act of service and obedience, would also punish him for each and every error. Likewise, this also is not understandable from the viewpoint of reason that a person brought up and favored by you should prove disloyal and treacherous and ungrateful in spite of your favors, and you, over-looking his collective attitude, should punish him for each act of treachery separately and reward him for each, even if most insignificant, act of service separately. As for the Quran and the Hadith, they have laid down a detailed law of rewards and punishments for the different categories of the people, be they believers, hypocrites, disbelievers, righteous believers, erring

believers, wicked and sinful believers, common disbelievers, or wicked and mischievous disbelievers, and these rewards and punishments pervade the entire life of man, from here to the Hereafter.

In this connection, the Quran has stated, in principle, certain things explicitly:

First, that the deeds of the disbelievers, idolaters and hypocrites (i.e. the deeds regarded as virtuous) have been rendered vain; they will receive no reward for them in the Hereafter. If at all they deserve a reward for them, they will receive it here in the world. For this, see Surah Al-Araf, Ayat 147; Surah At-Taubah, Ayat 17, 67-69; Surah Hud, Ayats 15-16; Surah Ibrahim, Ayat 18; Surah Al-Kahf, Ayat 104, 105; Surah An-Noor, Ayat 39; Surah Al-Furqan, Ayat 23; Surah Al-Ahzab, Ayat 19; Surah Az-Zumar, Ayat 65; Surah Al-Ahqaf, Ayat 20.

Second, that evil will be punished to the extent that evil has been committed, but the good deeds will be rewarded much more generously than what they will actually deserve. At some places it has been explicitly stated that a good act will have a ten-fold reward for it, and at others that Allah will increase the reward of the good act as much as He will please. For this, see Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 261; Surah Al- Anaam, Ayat 160; Surah Younus, Ayats 26-27; Surah An- Noor, Ayat 38, Surah Al-Qasas, Ayat 84; Surah Saba, Ayat 37, Surah Al-Mumin, Ayat 40.

Third, that if the believers abstained from major sins, their ordinary offences will be forgiven. (Surah An-Nisa, Ayat 31; Surah Ash-Shura, Ayat 37; Surah An-Najm, Ayat 32).

Fourth, that the righteous believer shall have an easy reckoning, his evils will be overlooked and he will be rewarded according to his best deeds. (Surah Al-Ankabut, Ayat 7; Surah Az-Zumar, Ayat 35; Surah Al-Ahqaf, Ayat 16; Surah Al-Inshiqaq, Ayat 8).

The Hadith is also very explicit in this regard. In the commentary of Surah Al-Inshiqaq above, we have cited the Ahadith which have been reported from the Prophet (peace be upon him) in connection with the explanation of easy reckoning and severe accountability. (See E.N. 6 of Surah Al-Inshiqaq). Anas says

that once Abu Bakr Siddiq was having his meals with the Prophet (peace be upon him). In the meantime this verse was revealed. Abu Bakr withdrew his hand from food and said: O Messenger (peace be upon him) of Allah, shall I see the result of every little evil that I have happened to commit? The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: O Abu Bakr, whatever unpleasant and troublesome things you experience in the world, will compensate for the little evils that you happened to commit, and Allah is reserving every little good that you do for your Hereafter, (Ibn Jarir, Ibn Abi Hatim, Tabarani in Al-Ausat, Baihaqi in Ash-Shuab. Ibn al-Mundhir, Hakim, Ibn Marduyah, Abd bin Humaid). The Messenger (peace be upon him) of Allah had also explained this verse to Abu Ayyub Ansari, saying: Whoever from among you does good will have his reward in the Hereafter, and whoever commits an evil will suffer punishment for it in this very world in the form of misery and disease. (Ibn Marduyah). Qatadah has related this saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him) on the authority of Anas: Allah does not wrong a believer in the world. He provides him sustenance in lieu of his good deeds, in the Hereafter He will reward him for these. As for the disbeliever, he is recompensed for his good deeds in the world itself; then when Resurrection takes place, he, will have no good work left to his credit. (Ibn Jarir). Masruq has related from Aishah that she asked the Prophet (peace be upon him): In the pre-Islamic days of ignorance Abdullah bin Judan treated his kindred kindly, fed the poor, received his guests well, earned freedom for the captives. Will this be of any use to him in the Hereafter? The Prophet (peace be upon him) replied: No, he never said until death: Rabbighfir-li khatiati yaum ad-din. My Lord, forgive me my errors on the Judgement Day. (Ibn Jarir). The Prophet (peace be upon him) also gave similar replies in respect of the other people, who did good deeds in the pre-Islamic days, but died as pagans. But there are certain other sayings of the Prophet (peace be upon him), which show that although the good done by a disbeliever cannot save him from the fire of Hell, yet in Hell he will not be subjected to the severe punishment which will be the lot of the wicked, sinful and villainous disbelievers, e.g. according to a Hadith, Hatim Tai in view of his generosity will be subjected to a light punishment in Hell (Ruh al-Maani).

However, this verse warns man of a truth of vital importance which is this: Even a most ordinary good has its own weight and its own value, and the same is also true of evil: even a most ordinary evil will also be considered and taken into account; it will not just be overlooked. Therefore, no good act, however small and insignificant, should be left, undone, for many such good acts can collect and be regarded as a major good act in the reckoning with Allah. Likewise, even a most ordinary evil also should not be committed, for a large number of such ordinary errors can become serious sins. The same thing has been described by the Prophet (peace be upon him) in several Ahadith. According to a tradition related in Bukhari and Muslim, on the authority of Adi bin Hatim, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: Save yourselves from the fire of Hell even if it be by giving away a pit of a date, or by uttering a good word. Again from Adi, in an authentic tradition, the Prophet's (peace be upon him) saying has been reported: Do not look upon any good work as insignificant, even if it be emptying a bucket into the vessel of one asking for water, or receiving a brother of yours with a pleasant face. According to a tradition reported in Bukhari from Abu Hurairah, the Prophet (peace be upon him), addressing the women, said: O Muslim women, no woman should look upon sending a gift to her neighbor as mean, even if it be the hoof of a goat. A tradition has been related in Musnad Ahmad, Nasai and Ibn Majah from Hadrat Aishah, saying that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: O Aishah, abstain from the sins which are looked upon as trivial, for they too will be enquired about by Allah. Musnad Ahmad contains a tradition from Abdullah bin Masud, saying that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: Beware of minor sins, for they will gather together on man so much so that they will kill him. (For the distinction between the grave and the trivial offences, see E.N. 53 of Surah An-Nisa and E.N. 32 of Surah An-Najm).